

Message Text

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SUBJECT: SCOTTISH REACTION TO THE DEVOLUTION BILL'S PASSAGE

1. (SUMMARY) PASSAGE OF THE DEVOLUTION BILL'S THIRD READING IN THE COMMONS WAS GREETED IN SCOTLAND WITH THE ATTITUDE THAT IT WAS ABOUT TIME. THERE IS ALSO CONCERN THAT THE BILL WILL BE ALTERED FURTHER BY THE TORY-CONTROLLED HOUSE OF LORDS, THUS CREATING EVEN FURTHER DELAYS. AMENDMENTS ADDED TO THE BILL HAVE DONE MUCH TO INCREASE SCOTTISH CYNICISM REGARDING THE TRUE FEELINGS OF ENGLISH MP'S. THE REQUIREMENT FOR A 40 PERCENT YES VOTE IN A DEVOLUTION REFERENDUM IS SEEN AS PARTICULARLY GALLING. POPULAR FEELING IS THAT THE ENGLISH ARE TRYING TO "DO THEM DOWN". THE EFFECT OF THIS HAS BEEN TO STRENGTHEN SCOTTISH SENTIMENT FOR DEVOLUTION AND INJECT A SLIGHT NOTE OF ANTI-ENGLISH FEELING INTO SCOTTISH PUBLIC OPINION. IF THESE TRENDS DEVELOP, ONE COULD FORSEE AN ANTI-ENGLISH GRUDGE VOTE IN THE REFERENDUM AND STRENGTHENED SNP SUPPORT. PASSAGE OF THE DEVOLUTION BILL, EVEN BY A SIZEABLE MAJORITY, DOES NOT ALTER THIS. HOWEVER, MOST SCOTS HOPE THAT A SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY, WHEN CONSTITUTED, WILL BE ABLE TO WORK OUT THE DIFFICULTIES CREATED BY THIS FLAWED BILL AND THEREFORE VIEW IT AS A BASE FROM WHICH TO START RATHER THAN AS A FINISHED PRODUCT. (END SUMMARY)

2. THE AMENDMENT TO THE DEVOLUTION BILL REQUIRING A FORTY

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PERCENT YES VOTE OF THE REGISTRATION ROLL IN THE DEVOLUTION REFERENDUM FOR IMPLEMENTATION IS WIDELY VIEWED AS BEING GROSSLY UNFAIR. NO SUCH REQUIREMENT WAS INCLUDED IN THE REFERENDUM ON THE COMMON MARKET. EVEN SOME STRONG UNIONISTS ARE UPSET ABOUT THIS ONE. IT IS FELT BY MANY TO ILLUSTRATE THE CONTEMPT OF ENGLISH MP'S FOR THE SCOTS, EVEN THOUGH ITS LABOR PROPOSER (GEORGE CUNNINGHAM) IS A SCOT HIMSELF, ALTHOUGH HE REPRESENTS

A LONDON CONSTITUENCY. MOST POLLS CONTINUE TO SHOW STRONG SUPPORT FOR DEVOLUTION, AND PROPOSALS SUCH AS THIS ONE ONLY STRENGTHEN FEELINGS, AGGRAVATE PUBLIC OPINION, AND INCREASE SUPPORT FOR THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARTY (SNP).

3. THE AMENDMENT AFFORDING SHETLAND AND ORKNEY ISLANDERS THE RIGHT TO OPT OUT OF THE SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY IF THEY VOTE "NO" IN THE REFERENDUM HAS CAUSED LESS COMMENT, ALTHOUGH IT WILL CERTAINLY BE THE CAUSE OF FUTURE CONTENTION. SCOTTISH SECRETARY BRUCE MILLAN POINTS OUT THAT THE POSITION OF SHETLAND AND ORKNEY OUTSIDE OF A DEVOLVED SCOTLAND WOULD BE ADMINISTRATIVELY "IN LIMBO." THE ISLANDERS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT SAFEGUARDING THE SPECIAL POWERS AND LARGE OIL REVENUES OF THEIR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS. MANY DO NOT FEEL A VERY STRONG IDENTIFICATION WITH SCOTLAND ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE BEEN PART OF SCOTLAND FOR OVER 500 YEARS AND THERE HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLE INTERCHANGE OF POPULATION.

4. SCOTTISH LABOR MP TAM DALYELL'S AMENDMENT PROHIBITING THE DEVOLUTION REFERENDUM FROM TAKING PLACE AT THE SAME TIME OR LESS THAN NINETY DAYS AFTER A GENERAL ELECTION IS VIEWED BY MANY AS A CYNICAL PIECE OF WORK DESIGNED TO SPARE ANTI-DEVOLUTION MP'S THE EMBARRASSMENT OF CAMPAIGNING FOR ELECTION WHILE OPPOSING A KEY PART OF THEIR PARTY PLATFORM.

5. MOST SCOTS ARE THANKFUL THAT THE DEVOLUTION BILL HAS PASSED THE COMMONS, AND AWAIT ITS BECOMING LAW, ALTHOUGH THEY ARE UNCLASSIFIED

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CONCERNED ABOUT THE LENGTHY DELAY AND CERTAIN OF THE BILL'S PROVISIONS AND AMENDMENTS. ITS PROSPECTS FOR PASSAGE IN A REFERENDUM REMAIN STRONG, EVEN WITH THE 40 PERCENT RULE. OPTIMISTS BELIEVE THAT A SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY WILL BE ABLE TO WORK OUT THE KINKS, EITHER THROUGH ITS OWN LEGISLATION OR BY NEGOTIATION WITH WESTMINSTER. SOME OTHERS BELIEVE THE BILL TO BE IRREMEDIALABLE AND SEE IT AS LEADING TO SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE AND THE BREAKUP OF THE UNITED KINGDOM. A VERY SMALL MINORITY ALSO VIEW THE BILL AS HOPELESS BUT SEE THE ASSEMBLY BECOMING SUCH A FASCO THAT THE SCOTS WILL RUN BACK INTO THE ARMS OF WESTMINSTER. THIS IS THE MOST UNLIKELY SCENARIO. MOST SCOTS RECOGNIZE THAT THE BILL IS NOT IDEAL (THE ASSEMBLY HAS NOT VERY LIMITED FINANCIAL POWERS), BUT VIEW IT AS A BASIS UPON WHICH TO BEGIN WORK FOR IMPROVED SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT.DOBBS

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